

Citizens Liaison Committee to Community Center
Minutes – May 18, 2005 – lobby, Takoma Park Municipal Building, 7500 Maple Ave.

Meeting convened at 7:30 p.m.

Members present:

Howard Kohn — chair

Juanita Kus-Lorentz – recorder

Stephen Brown, Dallas Burtraw, Andy Keleman, Phillipe Chao (guest), Tom Gagliardo, Peter Kovar, Erik Lichtenberg, Dave Lorentz (guest), Alice Sims, and Cindy Dyballa.

Staff: Suzanne Ludlow

Item One: Naming the new Center

Suggestions were made that the entire complex, including the library and the new computer center, be named “Takoma Center”, “Takoma Civic Center”, or “Takoma City Hall.” “Park” was left out to make the name shorter.

Consensus reached on a recommendation to name the complex the “Takoma Center” on a Victorian-style sign located at the Maple-Philadelphia intersection, with additional signs indicating the library and police station. The Community Center would be called “Sam Abbott Community Center.” This sign would be over the front entrance.

Item Two: Parking requirements at the Center

Suzanne Ludlow reported that the County does not require a minimum number of spaces at the community center, and that the City decides on how many spaces are ultimately needed. One way to reduce the number needed is to have an operating plan where major events would not be scheduled in the auditorium and the gym at the same time.

The evening is when there is most demand for parking. Most meetings start at 7:30 pm weekdays. Current parking will likely accommodate weekend use.

Under current construction, we’ll have a total of 142 parking spaces, which includes the parking lot in the back and a new front lot, which goes partially under the computer lab. One or two spaces may be taken away from each side of the Philadelphia Ave.-side entrance. About 5-7 spaces would be taken away if the gym is built on a cement slab, or about 20-22 spaces could be constructed under a gym, but this would be expensive.

Where can more parking be found? The Pepco lot across Maple from City Hall could be used for approximately 25-30 additional spaces, though nearby residents are concerned about the impact on their neighborhood. There also could be angled parking on Maple Ave., but Suzanne Ludlow reported that this might raise safety problems.

Other parking possibilities:

- There is a parking lot on Darwin, which is a bit of a walk, and currently is under-lighted.
- The entrance to Ed Wilhelm field could be improved and the black-top at the side of the field could fit approximately 40 spaces.
- Off-site parking for city vehicles during “off” hours. Most police vehicles need to be on-site, but perhaps not all. City vehicles could be parked at Public Works site.
- There is parking at the three schools, which could be used for overflow parking. Other overflow parking could be obtained at the Franklin Apts. Down the block on Maple Ave. (at Lincoln Ave.)
- The utility lot across Maple Ave. could be re-done with a metal grid and grass growing up through the grid to do less environmental damage than a paved lot would do.

- Approximately 15 spaces could be obtained by parking on the library lawn.

Other comments:

- One alternative is to build a double-deck parking lot in the rear of the community center. Vines could cover the outside to lessen the eyesore to nearby residents. According to Knott, cost for a two-story above ground parking structure is about \$1 million. The cost for underground parking is about 2-3 times more per space, according to Knott.

Grant Avenue resident Phillipe Chao pointed out that most residents on upper Grant Ave. don't have driveways. Residents may ask the Council for permit parking similar to other streets.

Howard Kohn, as non-voting chair, oversaw "straw vote" on eight parking options.

Options were listed, and voted on by each person present voting A for preferable, B middle, or to be discussed later, and C for non-starter.

Options, listed in the order of desirability according to the vote:

Options with the most A votes:

- Create 15-plus spaces of angled parking along Maple Ave.
- Create 15-25 spaces at the Pepco lot across the street, contingent on using metal grills for a surface and preserving the mature oak trees and most of the grass.
- Move city vehicles off site during non-working hours, freeing up 5-15 spots, depending on needs of police department.

B Options:

- School parking lots (Takoma Elementary, Piney Branch and Takoma Middle) to be used for overflow. This plan would involve coordination with the County agency governing use-of-schools and the city.
- Apartment parking lots along Maple Ave. Recommended for overflow parking, perhaps with the use of a shuttle.
- Parking on the asphalt strip near Ed Wilhelm field. Would require permission from Park and Planning, Contingent on cutting a new access road from the City lot and closing the Grant Ave. driveway. Recommended only for overflow during major evening events.

Other options, in no particular order:

- 1.) Tier parking behind the City Building -- expensive but would create approx. 75 more spaces.
- 2.) Parking in Park & Planning lot at end of Darwin Ave. Extra lighting would be required,
- 3.) Parking on library lawn. Would probably only create 10-15 more spots, and would harm green space.

Item Three: Feasibility study for gym

Barb Matthews and others have suggested it would be a good idea to conduct a feasibility study to check soil conditions and other things that need to be known before a building is built. More discussion: steel vs. cinderblock, life cycle costs, geophysical borings.

There was consensus at this meeting that the City should conduct a study to try to foresee problems and eliminate cost overruns.

Motion by Dallas Burtraw: The Committee recommends that the Council appropriate sufficient funds to conduct a feasibility study for the gym. Seconded by Tom Gagliardo. Vote: unanimous approval.

